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NEVIUS & HAVILAND.

THE DECORATION OF CEILINGS.—II.*

BY G. T. ROBINSON, F. S. A.



ONE of the finest wall-paper conceptions was referred to in our last issue, viz.: a design for a Columbian wall-paper and frieze commemorating the discovery of America, by Walter Crane, which was designed for and exhibited by Messrs. Nevius & Haviland, at the Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York. We herewith give an illustration of the design for the frieze, which, for originality and beauty could not be surpassed. The design takes the form of five female figures, symbolic of Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australia, standing erect in argosies, making their way to the World's Fair at Chicago. The pose of the figures is exceedingly graceful, and their interlacement forms one of the finest possible motives for frieze decoration.



NEW fashion in ornament was created by Robert Adams, from a study of the degenerate Roman architecture then prevailing in modern Italy. He discovered a species of stucco work, similar to that employed by a cheap mirror and picture frame maker, which was a putty like mixture, compressed into boxwood moulds, and from this pastry-cook ware of pliant material and a few matrices of honeysuckle ornaments, masks and scrolls, he arranged, often with grace and elegance, meandering festoons and sprays, which *per se* were not by any means without merit, but which by constant iteration became nauseous.



COLUMBIAN WALL-PAPER FRIEZE. DESIGNED BY WALTER CRANE. MANUFACTURED BY NEVIUS & HAVILAND.

One of the choicest designs produced for the present season's trade by the above firm is a pattern known as the "Versailles," of which we give an illustration on the following page. It is an adaptation of Rococo motives, produced in the form of hanging, frieze, stiling and ceiling center, printed on 30-inch in-grain, thus giving the decorator the entire combination ready for application. The frieze is most imposing, the design forming a large Rococo cartouche, the ground of which is in a complimentary tone to that of the ground of the frieze itself. This panel is outlined with magnificent scrollage, and alternates with escutcheons of a similar but smaller character, and gilt is judiciously applied to enrich the design.

Another fine pattern is an Empire conception known as the "Josephine." The pattern consists of a simple gold wreath, in some cases filled with medallions, printed on old blue, sap green, pale olive, Roman pink, and similar *recherche* colorings. There is an Empire frieze to match, which is designed after the various examples of Empire ornament.

There was one redeeming quality in Adam's own work: he did provide cartouches for low-relief figure work or for paintings by such elegant artists as Cipriani or Angelica Kauffman, and other painters of inferior grace and equal decorative weakness.

Of course a process so easily applied and so new became immensely popular. The demand was greater than the limited band of Italian workmen could supply, so, with characteristic energy, an Englishman fathomed their secret, and finally succeeded in producing the fashionable "compo" which was covering not only the ceilings, but the walls, the chimney-pieces, the door frames, picture frames, musical instruments, and the other places which good hand-wrought carving hitherto had occupied.

Once let loose the new process run rampant, and the grace and elegance which brought it into vogue soon disappeared at

* See first article on this subject in our October, 1892, issue.

the ruder hands into which it afterward fell; it became bad in manufacture, and design it had none. This was bad enough, but worse followed, and an evil which yet survives—or rather weighs upon us, for there never was life in it—came in, cast plaster work.

Pliant putty had at least the merit that it was light; you could bend its flexible sprays about, open it here and close it there, and give some touch of human handicraft to it; but the rigid fossilised plaster, which must be thick and stout enough to handle whilst cementing it to its groundwork, and heavy enough to bruise your head, for the sin you had committed, if it fell, that, that was the direful depth which the ceiling “decorator” raised on high. Do not you know too well those hideous centre-flowers; those curiously bad angle pieces; that dreadful running border as stiff as a corpse? and can you believe that people once rejoiced in such things and that these were admired? and, alas! are still in too many cases decreed the fitting inmates of our “tasteful homes.” Thanks to the fitful and vacillating deity who presides over that portion of man’s minds they call Taste, we are in some measure delivered from all these evils, and a new fashion has set in.

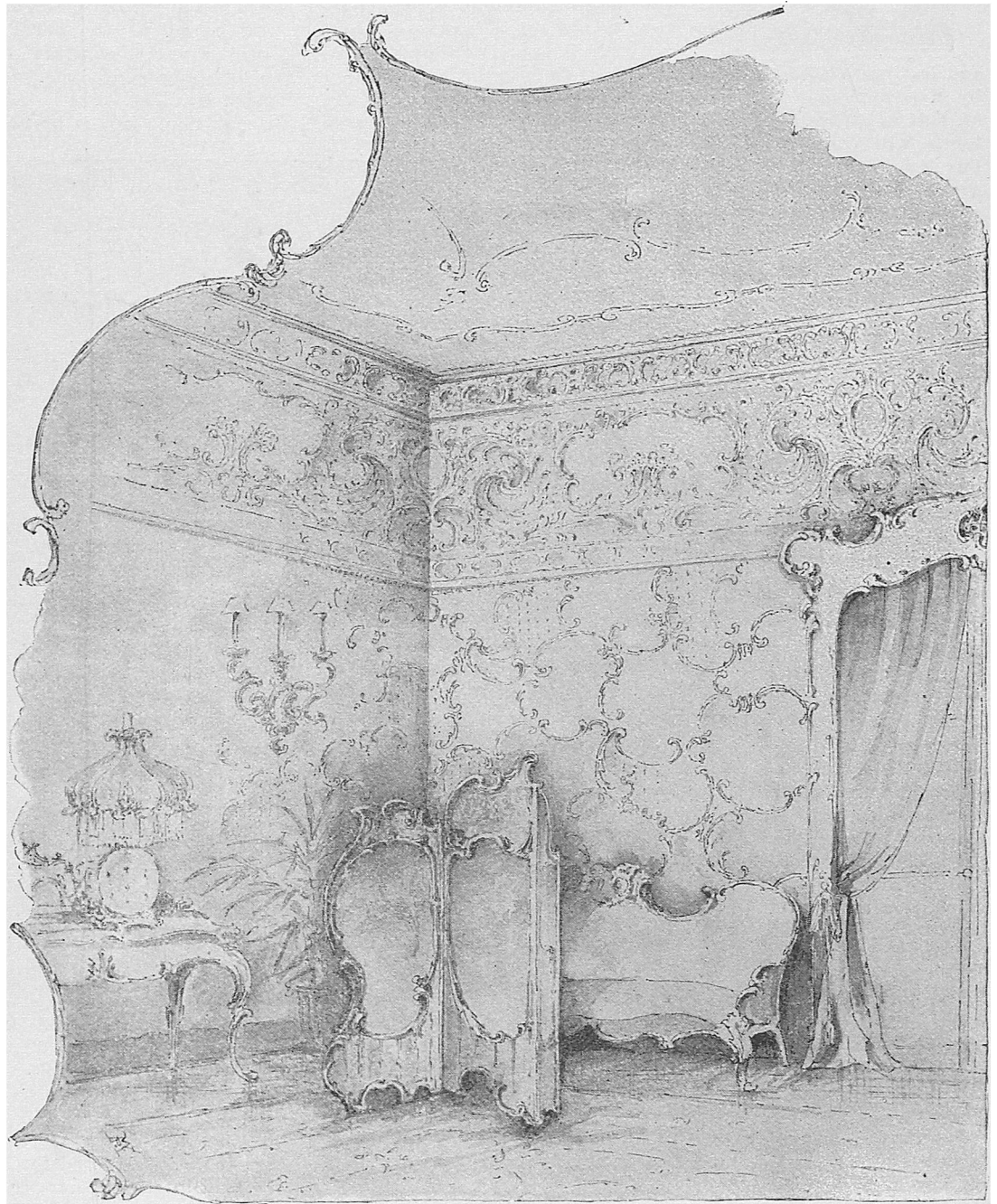
The comparatively recent invention of “canvas plaster”—that is thin canvas pressed into the plaster whilst fluid—enables large surfaces of plaster to be cast very thinly and lightly. Moreover, the relief work is cast at the same time and in the same piece as the groundwork, so that the relief may be as low, and the detail as small as desired, obviating the grossness which was a necessity of the former process. This enables the designer to model his work in clay in precisely the same manner as the old stucco worker did his ceiling, save that it is not done *in situ*, so that the artist must exercise his reason instead of his eye. From this model a mould is taken in gelatine, which, being pliant, enables the undercut portions of the mould, and consequently the cast, to relieve itself, and an effect of lightness to be attained with ease, which under the old process of rigid moulding could be but imperfectly obtained with much trouble and difficulty.

But the process I am speaking of has other advantages. All curves, as well as flat surfaces, can be executed in it and with equal ease, and this is a great advantage in large rooms, especially those in which accoustic qualities are the primary consideration. A further advantage of this process is that the work is put up quite dry, so that there is not only a great saving of time in finishing it, for the painting and gilding may be proceeded with almost immediately, but also there is no risk from damp.

If you have one of those terrible ceilings of centre-flowers and angles I have already spoken of, and also have, which sometimes occurs, as obdurate and terrible a landlord, you can cover up the former—unfortunately not the latter also—with a canvas plaster coating, and hide, if you are unable to destroy, the abomination.

The only thing to insist upon in a ceiling of this kind is to have it especially designed for you and a guarantee given you

by the manufacturer that the moulds shall not be reused. It is true it will cost you somewhat more, but you will have the satisfaction of knowing it is your own copyright and that you will not be nauseated by finding it reproduced in an inferior manner in whole rows by jerry-building speculators, who get the model cheap and pay only for the casting. This insensate reproduction is a thing to ban and to avoid. But is all reproduction and repetition a sin? By no means; it has its uses, and where a long line of architectural ornaments is introduced, such as the well known “egg-and-dart” ornament, “guilloches,” and other details which are essentially repetitive, and needed because they thus act as a foil to freer ornament, it would be folly not to avail oneself of this means of obtaining the desired



“THE VERSAILLES” WALL-PAPER. BY NEVIUS & HAVILAND.

end. The sin is in repeating the portions which pretend to be especially designed for one particular place and purpose, and reusing them where they are unfitting.

There is even a better means of securing this theft, that is by leaving those portions of the ceiling whereon you intend to display the most artistic work quite plain in the canvas plaster, and modelling on these in “gesso” the subject work. This has been admirably done by Mr. Walter Crane at Coombe Bank, Seven-oaks. That ceiling is divided into ten compartments by

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THE DECORATION OF CEILINGS.—II.

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moulded and cast ribs of beams, and the panels thus formed have their relief work directly modelled on the flat ground; and very delightful figure work most of it is, made rich with color and gilding. I need not say, having mentioned the artist's name, it is full of poetry and quaint fancy. This is the highest type of modern ceiling work in formative art, pure and beautiful in form, and glowing with color also, and towards such work as this should your aim be directed.

I have not yet said a word about painted ceilings. In an article of this kind, it is impossible adequately to set it forth; moreover, the treatment of the design is so enormously varied, and not being so bound by architectonic rules as the formative one, is more difficult to classify and analyse. Indeed, it would take a good sized volume, with colored illustrations, to describe and delineate. Yet it has wondrous charms, and has received the head and handwork of the greatest artists. Its success, however, does not merely depend upon its own merits, for it is simply the culminating point of one general scheme of decoration, and cannot be considered merely as ceiling decoration only, whether painted or modelled. Much finish is detrimental to effect, breadth being the essential quality. In a simpler form you can produce a very good effect by painted ornament—apart from pictorial illustration—and not aiming at "high art." In fact, when you cannot get figure work of the best drawing, it is far better not to have it at all, but confine yourself to ornamental detail. Until recently it has been hardly possible to get good figure painting in England except at a very high price, but there are nowadays so many of the younger artists who are not overburdened with work, but who are quite capable of doing it well and are content with a moderate reward; indeed I am glad to say I can point to many ceilings designed by me on which is the handiwork of several artists who are now members of the Royal Academy, and who then found this class of painting eminently useful and instructive to them, giving them the sense of breadth and the mastery of a large brush, greatly to their future good, together with a welcome, if moderate, addition to their purse.

Of course, a painted ceiling requires a painted wall; both must be considered permanent decorations, and both must tone together. Well done, under the right direction, they will last for generations, and, if proper materials are used, can be cleaned without injury, so that in the long run it is not an expensive process, as it seems. And it is not repeated everywhere; it is an individual work, and not a ready-made, mechanical affair, purchasable at per yard by anyone else. Yet there are ready made, mechanically produced expedients which are useful where circumstances prevent the use of the higher forms of decoration, where ephemeral decoration only is needed, and for the less important rooms in a house. Some of Mr. Scott Morton's embossed canvas patterns are very suitable for this purpose, and by the judicious use of a few moulded wood-ribs effective ceilings can be produced from them. Embossed papers, "Anaglypta," Lignomur, and many other low relief products are obtainable. Japanese paper, which combines both color and relief, can be very advantageously used with bamboo or other mouldings, and the gold ground is very effective in a somewhat dark room, and the flock paper painted in one tone and rolled with another, so as to pick out the ornamental pattern in a lighter or a darker tint, produces a good effect. But in all these cases you should do something to relieve the monotony of a large expanse of the same reticulated ornament, either by breaking up the surface by broad divisions into panels or constructing a broad border of another pattern.

BOKHARA PLUSH is the best material for mantel drapery. The drapery is made by taking a straight piece of the material, about twenty-four inches longer and four inches wider than the mantelpiece itself. The side is edged with cord and a tassel or a few pompons are hung at the corners. The drapery is placed straight on the mantelpiece, with the uncorded edge against the wall, and supports itself, being kept stationary by the ornaments, photographs and so on, we usually put on the shelf. The corners of the drapery should be lined with satin, either in a paler tint than the drapery or in some contrast, as the corners show and would not look nice unless they were lined.

HALBERT'S FRENCH APPLIQUE RELIEF.



NY worthy effort, either on the part of an individual or a community, which tends to the better appreciation or adoption of what is true and elevating in art, should be warmly commended, and, therefore, we take great pleasure in calling attention to Halbert's French Applique Relief, as being a subject of particular interest to the practical readers of THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER. Mr. George Halbert, who is, perhaps, the best known decorator in Brooklyn, has for some time past, in a quiet way, lavished a considerable amount of money and time upon the production of decorative plaster work of more than ordinary artistic merit. In the present day most of our internal plaster work of any pretensions is done in canvas plaster, and in the case of Halbert's French Applique Relief a thin coat of plaster of Paris is brushed over the mould, and very thin open canvas or muslin is pressed into this, and the compound of canvas and plaster when removed from the mould is dried in a hot room, and is then ready for application to wall or ceiling. In accordance with the decorative demands of the hour Halbert's French Applique Relief is very beautifully modeled in flowing Rococo ornament, Empire wreaths and festoons, Louis XVI. and Renaissance scrollage. From the illustrations of the various kinds of relief ornament on the opposite page, some idea can be had of the infinite variety, freedom and delicacy of the work.

Lightness, elegance and grace are the distinctive claims of this new form of decorative relief. Festoons and wreaths form a very important and pleasant feature thereof, as they have characterized every style of decoration for ages, and for decorative purposes will probably survive for many ages to come. These devices have been used with fine discrimination and restraint by Greek, Pompeian and Italian artists, and for friezes they make one of the pleasantest forms that decoration will take, giving apparent height and breadth.

Such light tracery is very suitable for dwellings, for halls, parlors, drawing rooms and bed-rooms, for friezes, coves, panels and ceiling decoration. The decoration is of great practical utility, for any ordinary paper-hanger or painter can apply the material to the wall after the manner of pressed papers, and the decorator himself gets credit for the work, which can be decorated in any desired manner. The material when once placed in position gives all the effect of hand modeled plaster, and is exceedingly decorative. The eight frieze designs shown on the opposite page give a good idea of the delicacy and beauty of Halbert's French Applique Relief.

Mr. Halbert informs us that, with the view of increasing the practical usefulness of his Applique Relief, he has a special staff of artists who prepare a great many color sketches, to show how the work will appear when decorated according to a given color scheme. These colored sketches, which are also applicable to all kinds of fresco work, are in great demand and, being sold at a nominal price, will prove invaluable to decorators.

Mr. Halbert makes a specialty of manufacturing special designs for decorators. Recently a Boston decorator, who was in search of a relief material, similar in design to that of a silk tapestry he was putting on the walls of a house, and not finding anything to suit in the many forms of relief material on the market, got Mr. Halbert to make him a special design to suit the decoration in progress. He not only secured the design, but also the exclusive control of it in Boston.

The new building occupied by the Brooklyn Street Railroad's offices, corner of Clinton and Montague Sts., in that city, has been recently decorated with Applique Relief, at the cost of five thousand dollars.

In the decoration of private dwellings, the ground floor apartments of the house of Mr. Thomas G. Shearman, (the friend of President Cleveland), on Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, which consist of a reception room and parlor *en suite*, separated by a screen of carved oak, the scheme of decoration in both apartments being similar; the walls are treated in an olive buff stippling, the frieze being a series of wreaths in French Applique Relief embellished with gold. The ceiling has a wide Rococo border, also in finely modeled Applique Relief, and the